

Chad Gardner

The grief we feel at the loss of Chad is in stark contrast with the way he lived. He enjoyed all the activities in the world of sports and family life. He loved to laugh, even at himself. In his early days he attended Guardian Angels Catholic School, where he began to form himself in the values that sustained him throughout his short life. Losing him so suddenly and unexpectedly has shaken all who love him. Chad would never have wanted to cause sorrow, but the emotions we feel today indicate the profound love people felt for a remarkable man.

The Catholic Church observes the feast of the Guardian Angels on October 2 each year, coming up in just a few days, and on this day, September 29, we remember the great archangels mentioned in the bible: Michael, Gabriel and Raphael. Angels are God's messengers. They provide protection and guidance, healing and strength. When we call someone an angel we mean we are touched by their kindness, service and care. It's easy to think of Chad in those terms. It makes us want to touch him all the more with our kindness, service and care.

For this reason today's first reading provides special comfort. The Books of the Maccabees recount the reclamation of the Temple in Jerusalem from the pagan Hellenists in the second century BC. Many warriors lost their lives all in the interest of restoring the Jewish religion. The passage we hear today tells how the ruler of Israel took up a collection among all the soldiers who survived and sent it to Jerusalem as a sacrifice. They were praying for soldiers who had died. Two centuries before the resurrection of Jesus, the Maccabees already intuited that prayer for the dead makes a difference. This passage says of the Jewish Judas Maccabaeus, "if he were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been useless and foolish to pray for them in death." Regarding the collection he took up, this passage says, "Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be freed from this sin." Christianity likewise teaches it is a noble thing to pray for the dead, that God may forgive their sins, receive them into his care, and grant them the reward of resurrection.

Our hope for Chad is stirred by the miracle recounted in today's gospel. Jesus enters the city of Nain, where a young man has died. He witnesses the grief of the mother, and gives a command that seems inappropriate and impossible: "Do not weep." Jesus touched the coffin, gave another command, "Young man, I tell you, arise," and the dead man revived. Through the mystery of the resurrection we believe Christ still manifests this power, receiving those who have died into the promised eternal life.

Chad lived a short time but crammed a lot of events and emotions into his years. The loss of his mother at the start of the pandemic in 2020 was difficult to endure. But the memories they both leave behind fill the people who remember them with gratitude to God for creating them, allowing them to enter this world and make an impact in the lives of others. Perhaps we can hear the command of Christ to us, "Do not weep," as we pray he will issue the eternal command to Chad, "Young man, I tell you, arise." Our hope remains firm that one day we may greet Chad again in a place the angels call home.